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OCI No. 2341/63

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
21 August 1963

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Coup Rumors in South Vietnam

Summary

Additional reports of plotting against the Diem government have been received. While there is no hard evidence of imminent action, the Buddhist issue continues to make the situation dangerous.

1. Buddhist agitation seems to be turning farther away from strictly religious issues and toward political questions. At least some Buddhist leaders appear convinced that Diem's overthrow will be only a matter of time if pressure can be maintained in the form of further suicides and public demonstrations. Buddhist demonstrations against the government are, in fact, drawing larger crowds in the principal cities. Student participation in these demonstrations is also increasing, particularly in Hue, where the firing this week of the university rector, who is known to be sympathetic to the Buddhists, has led to the resignation of many faculty members.

2. A group of alleged coup plotters headed by former presidential security service director Tran Kim Tuyen is reported to be ready for an early move against the government.

[redacted] previously reported coup deadlines were practice runs for various units headed by junior officers. The plan is for these units to seize vital installations in Saigon while a small group armed with automatic weapons executes a palace revolt against the Ngo family. Available information points to the existence of serious plotting by Tuyen, but the firmness of the group's resolve and the extent of its capabilities are uncertain.

DIA review(s) completed.

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3. There have been no recent reports of plotting among top-ranking military officers. Contrary to his earlier statements, the commander of the II Corps area in central South Vietnam, Brigadier General Khanh, told a US observer on 17 August that general officers did not intend to carry out a coup d'etat. Khanh claimed that the military leaders would act only if the country were on the verge of chaos. He claimed that the generals were in control of their subordinates down to the battalion level and would act to prevent a take over by any civilian plotters. The III Corps commander, General Dinh, states that he has six battalions on alert around Saigon for the purpose of supporting Diem in case of trouble from the Buddhists or in the event of a coup attempt.

4. Generals Khanh and Dinh probably are considered opportunists by their peers and not fully trusted within the military establishment. Khanh, in particular, may have tailored his comments for US consumption. His statement that the generals would not support a government headed by Vice President Tho contradicts the expressed views of other key officers.

5. It is difficult to assess recent statements attributed by the press to Ngo Dinh Nhu to the effect that a coup is inevitable if the present trend continues. It may be that Nhu expects a coup attempt and that his remarks were designed to throw plotters off stride. In a report of 13 August, the US air attache in Saigon reported that Madame Nhu had told an Australian correspondent that she expected a military coup within a few days. At the same time, the possibility of a take over by Nhu cannot be discounted.

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